

**Public Opinions about
Health Care in Manitoba:
Survey Results**

Prepared for
Manitoba Health
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Introduction

In November of 2001, the Manitoba Department of Health engaged Prairie Research Associates to conduct research to measure public opinions and attitudes regarding a variety of health care issues.

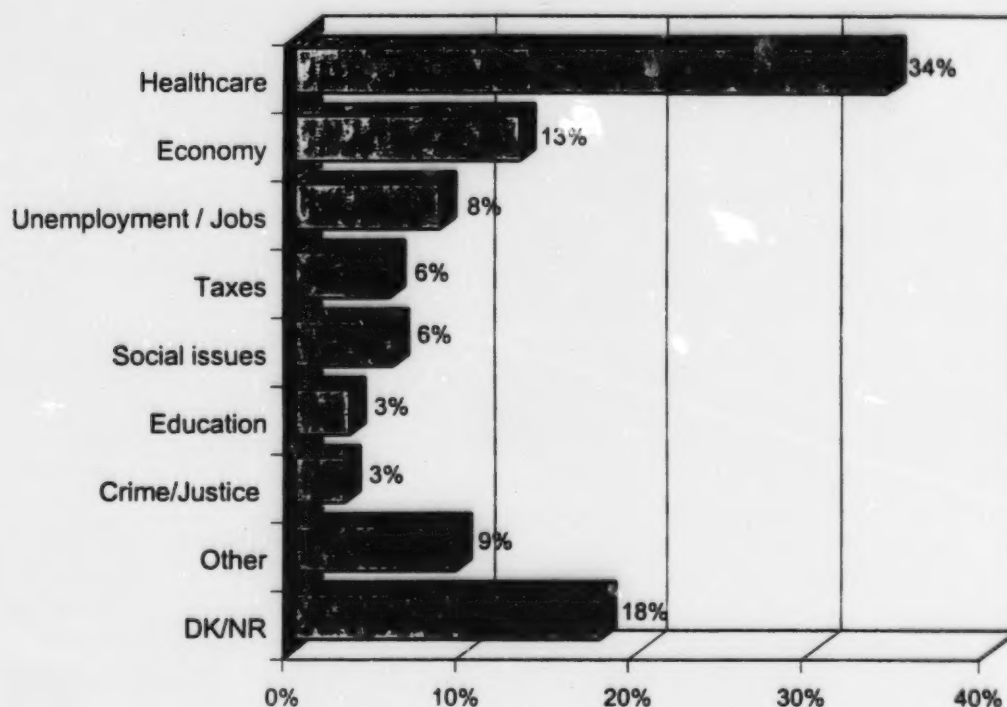
This survey was conducted by telephone by Prairie Research Associates during the period from November 26 to December 5, 2001. The sample of 1,213 adult Manitobans was drawn from randomly generated telephone numbers produced with a geographic distribution modeling the census distribution of households across the province.

The data were weighted by sex, age, and region to ensure that each region of the province was represented in approximate proportion to its population. The analysis for this study consisted of tabulation of the answers to each question by region, sex, age, and reported household income. For questions with numerical scales, means and standard errors were also calculated.

In the terms normally used to describe sample accuracy for surveys, a sample size of 1200 gives a margin of error of less than 3 percentage points 19 times out of 20. In order to shorten the length of the questionnaire, some of the questions were asked only of half the respondents. For those questions, the margin of error is approximately 4 percentage points.

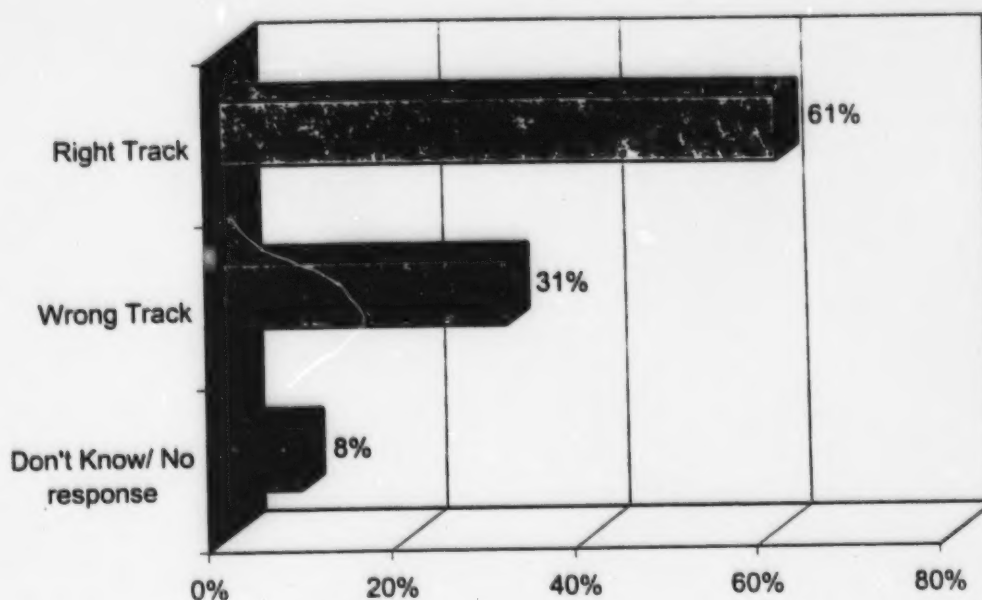
General Issues

Single most important issue or problem facing Manitobans today



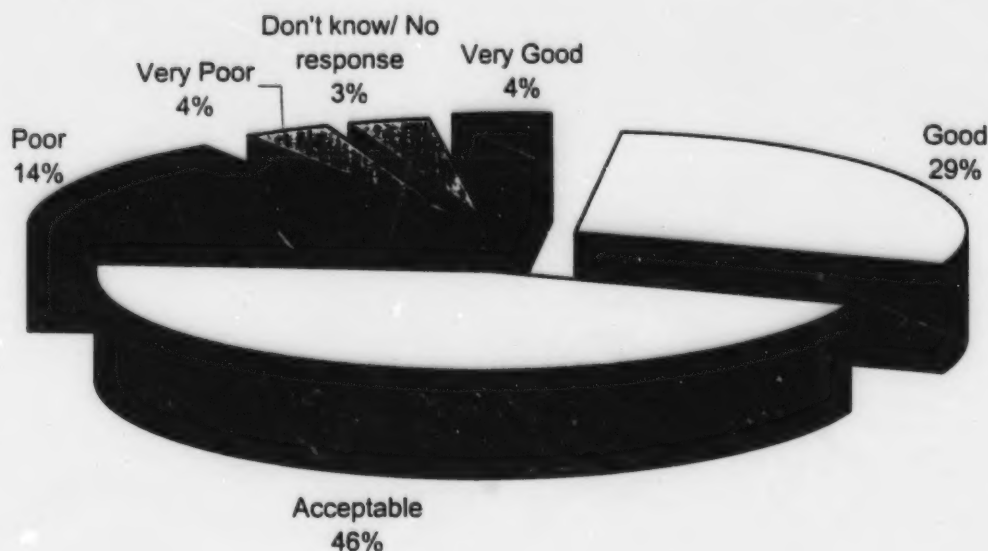
- 34% of Manitoba residents see health care as the most important priority facing Manitobans today.
- After health care, economic issues such as the economy (13%), jobs (8%), and taxes (6%) were seen as next most important, but all three together did not concern as many people as health care did.
- "Other" concerns mentioned included a wide range of things such as agriculture, the environment, the effects of Sept. 11, and globalization, but none of these was mentioned by more than a handful of people.

Is Manitoba going in the right direction or on the wrong track?



- By a margin of about 2 to 1, Manitobans see the province as being on the right track.
- While there were some differences across demographic groups, a majority in every group chose the "right track".
- Young people and those in the middle income group were the most positive (69% and 66% "right track" respectively) while older people and those in the lowest income group were least positive (both 57%).

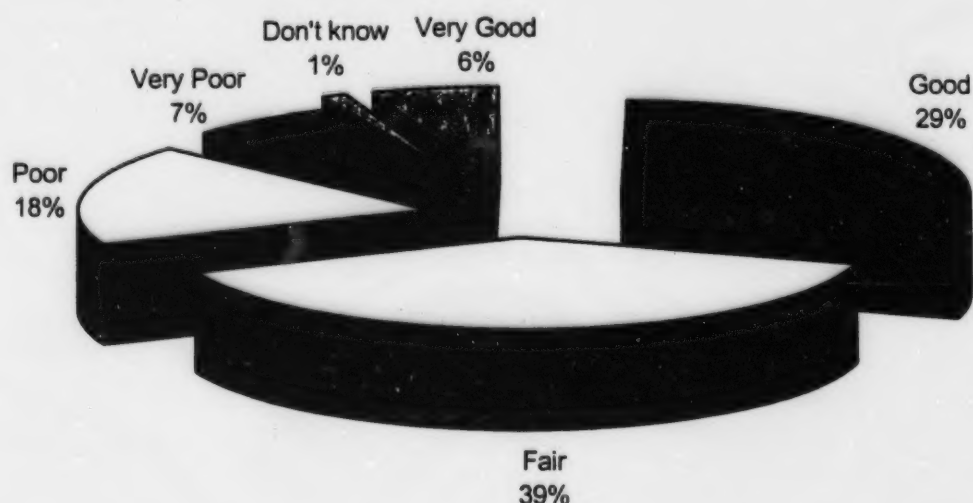
What kind of job has the provincial government been doing?



- Almost 8 in 10 (79%) Manitobans give the government a passing grade ("acceptable" or better).
- The ratings were very similar across demographic groups. Women and young people were the most positive (81%) while those in the highest income bracket were least positive (75%), but the range between the highest and lowest ratings was very small.

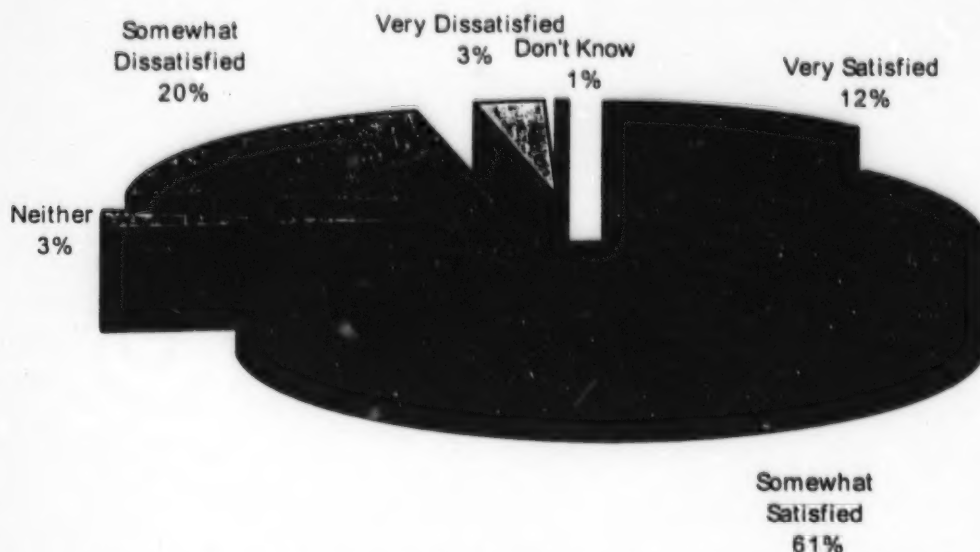
Opinions about the Health Care System

Describe Manitoba's health care system overall



- About three-quarters of Manitobans (74%) give the health care system a passing grade ("fair" or better). More than one-third rate it "good" or "very good".
- There was almost no difference between Winnipeg respondents and those outside Winnipeg on this question.
- Women were more critical than men - 28% of women rated health care less than "fair" compared to 22% of men.
- Those in the middle income bracket were most positive toward the health care system (78%), while those in the lowest and highest income categories were less positive (74% and 72% respectively).

Are you satisfied with the quality of health care in Manitoba?



- A similar question later in the survey produced a similar response. About three quarters (73%) of the respondents said they are satisfied with the quality of health care in Manitoba.
- Most of those (61%) fall into the "somewhat satisfied" category while only just over 1 person in 10 is "very satisfied".
- Less than 1 in 4 (23%) describe themselves as "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied".

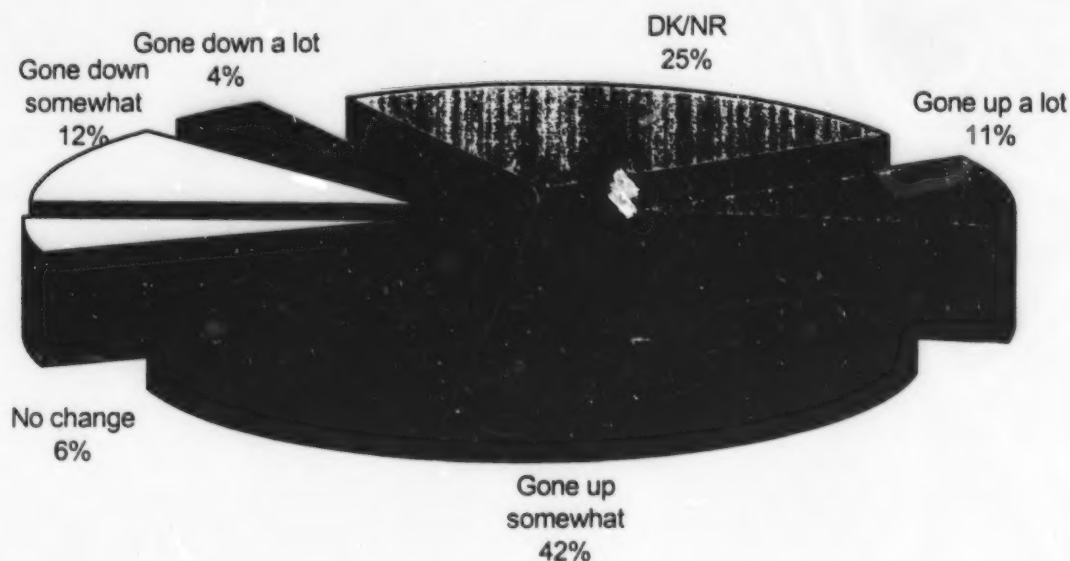
How satisfied are you with the medical care you received over the past year?



- Personal satisfaction with care received is substantially higher than satisfaction with the system as a whole.
- Overall, almost 9 out of 10 of the people who had been in contact with the health care system in the past year said they were satisfied with the care they had received (41% "very satisfied").
- There were no significant differences across demographic groups on this question.

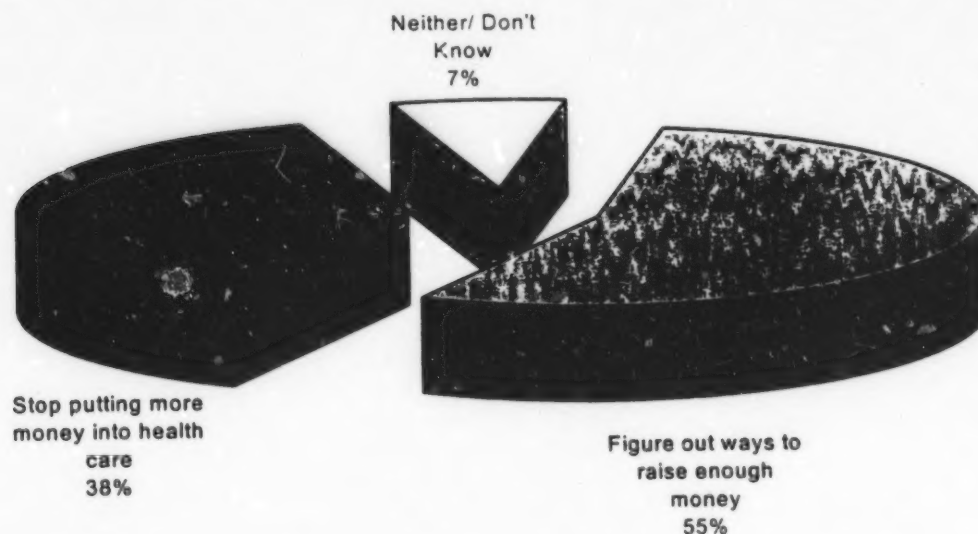
Health Care Funding

Do you believe health care spending in Manitoba gone up or down in recent years?



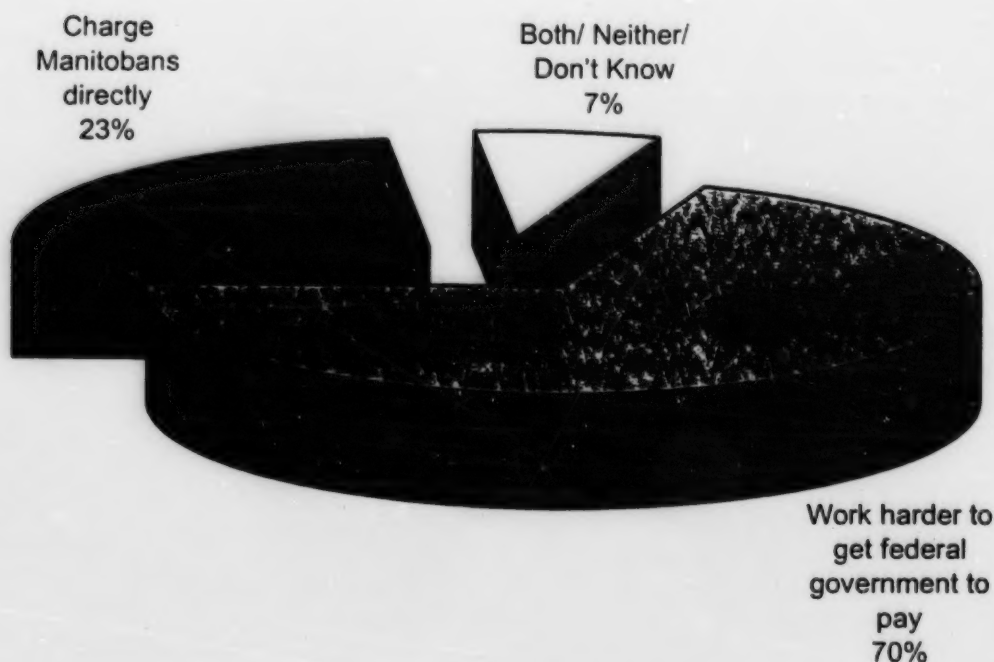
- While many people (53%) were aware that health care spending had, in fact, increased in recent years, a very large proportion either did not know how spending had changed (25%) or thought it had actually gone down (16%).
- Among people who thought spending had dropped, 68% also said the state of health care has been declining while among those who knew spending had increased, only 38% thought health care was declining.
- While only about half knew that health care spending has been increasing, even fewer knew just how much money goes into health care. Almost half (44%) of the people surveyed said they didn't know what percentage of the budget goes to health care, one third (33%) thought it was less than 30%, and only about 1 person in 10 thought it was in the 30%-40% range.

Is more money required for health care?



- The balance of opinion was on the side of putting more money into health care (55%) rather than holding the line on costs and making do with what we have now (38%).
- Young people were the most likely to favour increasing funding to health care (61%) while the people with the highest incomes were least likely (47%) to support more funding. Even in the latter group, however, the balance of opinion favoured more funding (47% to 45%).
- As well, over half of respondents (51%) said they think health care has improved or stayed the same in recent years.
- Staff shortages, waiting lists and patients in hallway remain the main concerns.
- Among those who say things are getting better, shorter waiting lists, less hallway medicine, and positive personal experiences with the system are the most often mentioned reasons for their optimism.
- When they were asked what should be done to improve the system, the answers were similar – more money, more staff, shorter waiting times and better management.

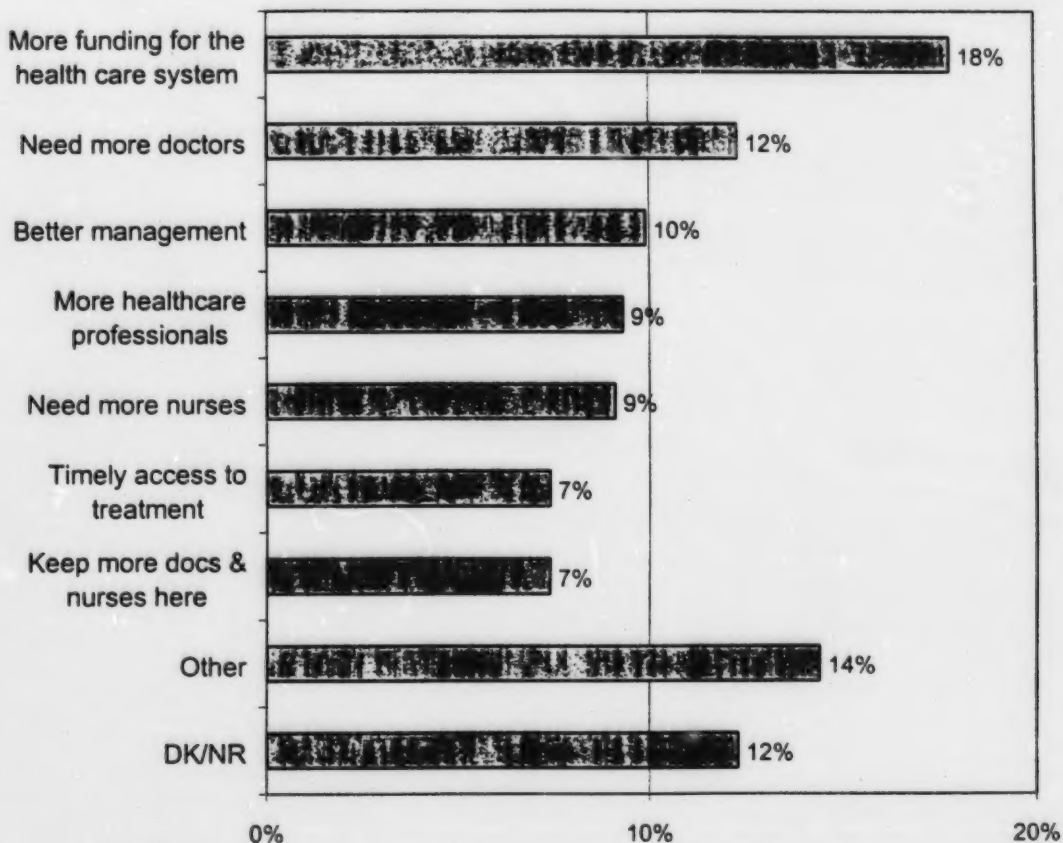
Should non-core Medicare services be paid for by federal government or through some sort of direct payment by patients?



- A clear majority would prefer that the federal government pay its fair share of all health care costs (70%) versus Manitobans paying directly via some sort of premium or fee for programs such as Pharmacare and homecare.
- There was very little difference across demographic groups on this question. People in the highest income group were more likely than most to favour the extra fees, but even among this group they were about 2.5 times more likely to favour getting more money from the federal government (68% to 26%).

Opinions about Solutions

What do you think would be the most important thing that could be done to improve the health care system in Manitoba?



- Of the top seven mentions, 4 identified increasing or maintaining staff numbers.
- Two of the others dealt with increasing capacity in terms of its necessary antecedent (more funding) and its hoped for outcome (shorter wait times).

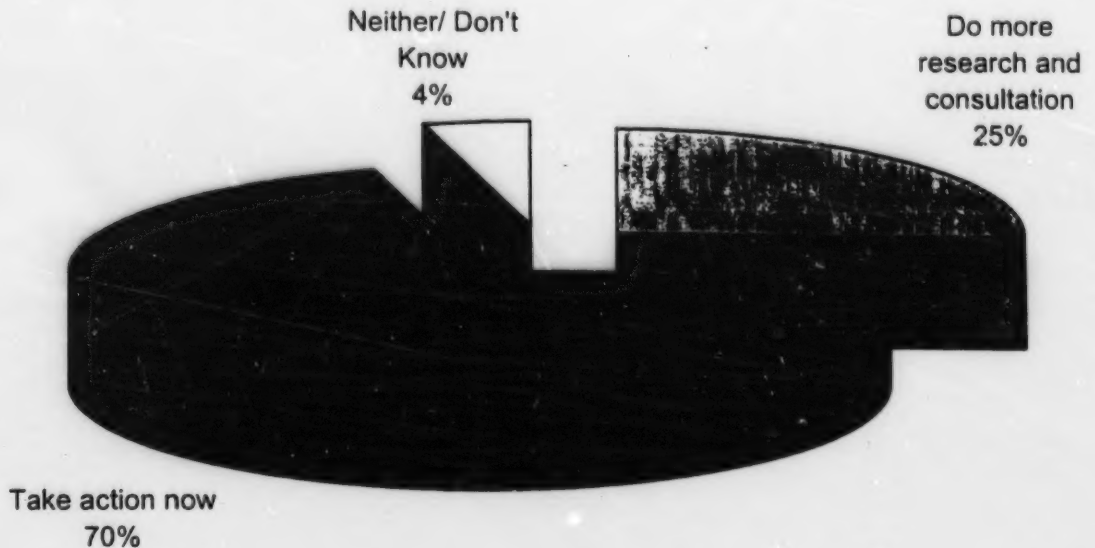
There have been a lot of different suggestions made in the past few years about ways we could make our health care system work better. (Support on a 1 to 7 scale)

	Support (5-7)	Neutral/ Don't Know	Oppose (1-3)
Having people who use health care services pay more of the cost of those services by charging them a user fee each time	28%	13%	59%
Letting people pay extra if they want faster treatment	35%	10%	55%
Limiting free health care to only essential and medically necessary services provided by physicians	26%	16%	57%
Dropping coverage of prescription drug costs	25%	13%	61%
Allowing trained professionals such as nurses and physician assistants to provide a broader range of medical services	76%	13%	11%
Charging people annual premiums for their health care coverage the way private health insurance plans do	18%	16%	66%
Changing to a private, for profit system like the one in the US	8%	7%	85%
Charging user fees for emergency room visits to discourage misuse	36%	17%	47%
Dropping medicare coverage of some services	16%	13%	71%
Letting private clinics offer diagnostic and surgical treatment to those who want to pay for it themselves	59%	12%	29%
Closing some underutilized hospitals in order to improve the facilities and services at the bigger regional centres	23%	15%	61%

*Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding

- The only suggestions which garnered any degree of public support were the two dealing with increasing capacity - 76% approved of expanding the role of nurses and physician assistants and 59% approved of expanding the role of private clinics.
- In contrast, majorities opposed all but one of the revenue enhancing and cost cutting measures. The strongest opposition was seen in relation to of switching to a private, for-profit US style system of health care (85% opposed).
- The one cost cutting measure that was not opposed by a majority (although the balance of opinions was against it) was adding user fees for emergency room visits (47% opposed compared to 36% supporting).
- The public's ambivalence about solutions was also seen in a question which asked them to choose between three alternatives: user fees, health care premiums, and dropping coverage of some services. None of the three attracted a majority of respondents, and a substantial number of people either chose "none of the above" or said they could not make a choice between these options.
- About one person in 3 favoured user fees, one in 4 favoured premiums, and just over one in 5 favoured dropping coverage of some services.

Is more extensive consultation needed before governments take action to change the health system?



- Seven out of 10 (70%) thought that we need action now while only 25% thought more study is needed.
- There were few differences across demographic groups on this question. Interestingly, the one that stood out was that young people are much more likely than most to want more research (34%) before any changes are made.

Nursing Issues

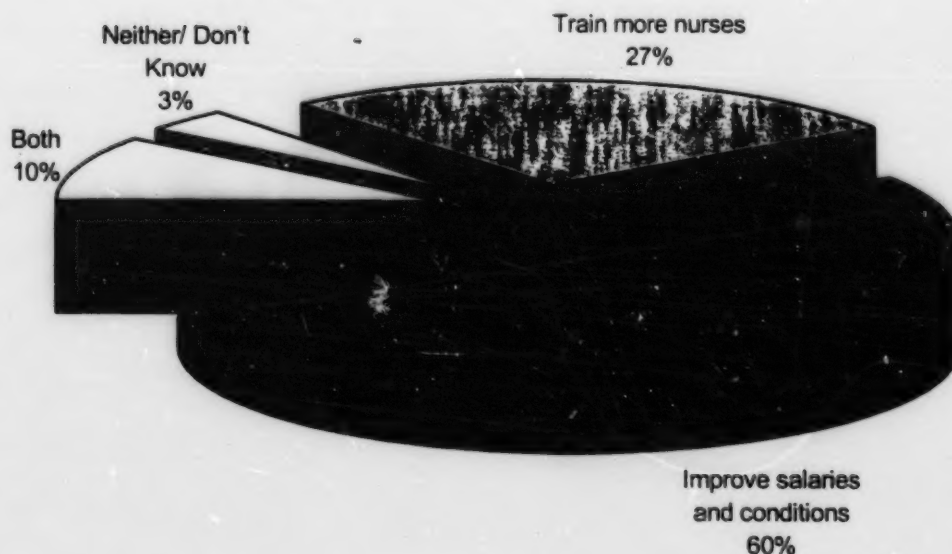
Would you tell me whether you would support or oppose these ideas to increase the availability of nurses in Manitoba. (Support on a 1 to 7 scale)

	Support (5-7)	Neutral/ Don't know	Oppose (1-3)
Increasing hospital's hiring budgets so they could hire more nurses	84%	8%	8%
Raising nurses salaries to match the highest levels paid by other provinces	62%	15%	24%
Getting the federal government to transfer more money to the province to pay health care costs	86%	7%	6%
Increasing the number of training positions for nurses in colleges and universities	86%	9%	5%
Recruiting more nurses from other countries to work here	46%	17%	37%
Raising nurses salaries to match the Canadian average	82%	9%	10%

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- There was strong support for 4 of the 6 measures described and moderate support for a fifth.
- The only measure which was supported by less than a majority was the recruiting of foreign nurses (46% support, 37% oppose).
- People were strongly in favour of setting Manitoba nurses' wages at the Canadian average (82%) but less supportive of matching the top rate paid elsewhere (62%).

Which is a higher priority, raising nurses' salaries or training more nurses?



- Sentiment ran about 2:1 in favour of improving wages and working conditions (60% compared to 27%).
- Older people and those in the lowest income groups were less likely than most to prefer improving salaries (51% and 55% respectively) while the youngest and those in the highest income bracket were most likely to favour that option (both 66%).

Beliefs, Attitudes and Values.

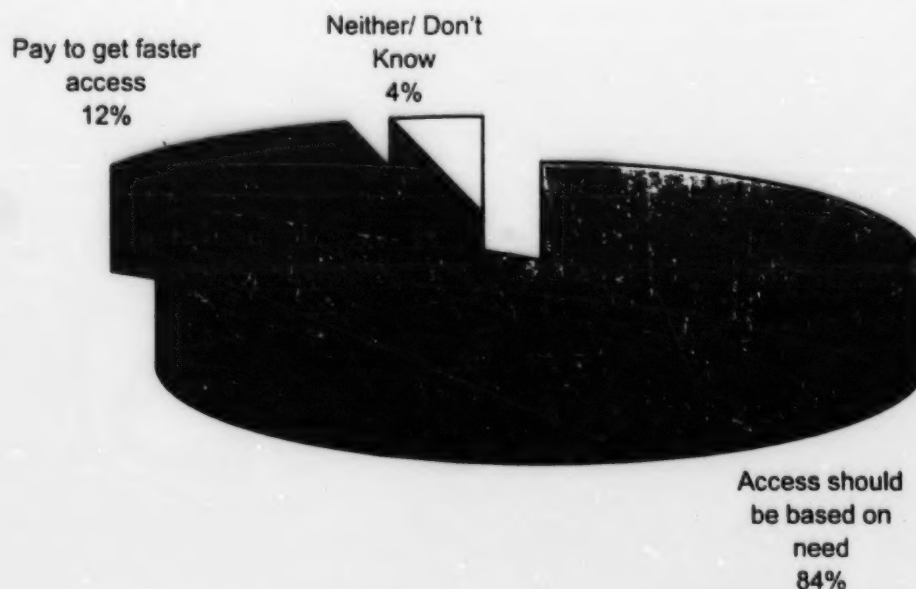
How do you feel about the following statements? (Support on 1 to 7 scale)

	Agree (5-7)	Neutral/ Don't Know	Disagree (1-3)
We should set up more outpatient clinics to provide the non-urgent care services that are now being handled by emergency rooms.**	81%	13%	7%
The most important thing for this provincial government to do is to address health care needs.**	77%	12%	11%
There are not enough family doctors available now to meet the needs of Manitoba families. **	77%	12%	12%
The best way to keep health costs down would be to do more to prevent all those lifestyle illnesses caused by smoking, drinking, overeating and lack of exercise. **	71%	13%	16%
The provincial government should do more to discourage people from going to emergency rooms with minor medical problems. **	70%	13%	18%
Many people misuse the healthcare system. **	68%	16%	14%
The provincial government should spend more money on programs to discourage smoking among young people. **	66%	10%	24%
Governments should look at raising taxes to address waiting lists for tests or surgeries.	52%	20%	28%
Wage levels for nurses in Manitoba don't need to be as high as they are in Ontario, Alberta or BC because the cost of living here is much lower than in those provinces. **	52%	14%	33%
The provincial government is working hard to fix the problems in health care.	41%	26%	32%
The provincial government has a good plan for health care.	37%	31%	33%
The provincial government is making good progress in health care. **	35%	32%	34%
While some people may have to wait for some medical procedures, waiting times for emergency cases are rare.	33%	25%	42%

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**Split sample

Medical care should be based on need rather than ability to pay



- More than 4 out of 5 people thought that access to timely treatment should be based on need rather than ability to pay.
- Support for paying to get faster access to medical services increased with income, but even in the highest income group only 1 person in 6 (16%) favoured that option.

Are waiting lists necessary to prioritize those who need treatment first?



- Most agreed waiting lists as a reasonable way of managing access to scarce resources but a large segment see waiting lists as an impediment to timely access to treatment.

How do you feel about the following statements? (Support on 1 to 7 scale)

	Agree (5-7)	Neutral/ Don't Know	Disagree (1-3)
Our system of providing free health care for everyone is an important part of our Canadian identity.**	88%	7%	5%
No matter how much more money we put into health care, there will always be waiting lists for some types of services at least some of the time.	85%	8%	7%
There has been too much talk about health care and not enough action on health care.	82%	10%	7%
The Canadian health care system may not be perfect, but it is better than any of the alternatives.**	75%	14%	11%
People with medical problems that are not life-threatening often have to wait a long time for treatment.	72%	16%	10%
Canada's healthcare system is one of the best in the world.**	73%	14%	13%
The provincial government should be doing more to tell us what health care programs are available to us.**	67%	14%	19%
If I had a serious health problem, I am confident that medical care would be there when I needed it.	64%	15%	21%
The fact that some people have to wait for tests or surgery is not a problem as long as their doctors agree that the wait does not affect the quality of their treatment.	64%	15%	22%
The problems with our health care system now are mainly due to the federal government's cutbacks over the past 20 years.	62%	20%	19%
We are not getting good value for the amount of money we are spending on health care now.**	49%	22%	30%
The healthcare system needs a complete overhaul to make it work.	45%	19%	35%

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**Split sample